



ROUTE 7

DOWN THE LAMONE TOWARDS THE SEA *

Departure: Bagnacavallo

Arrival: Punta Alberete and Marina Romea beach

Length: km 35

Difficulty: medium

Surface: dirt track for 90% of the way, best suited for mountain bikes

* this route is negotiable as of spring 2006

Earth and water are the key elements of this route. It's a route which is best enjoyed at an easy pace, giving you time to appreciate the scenery to the full, with its cultivated fields, reclaimed marshes and intact wetlands, salt-water lagoons and pine woods. The presence of water dominates the entire countryside: the precious fresh water of the Lamone which irrigates the earth, and the salt water of the placid Adriatic, for centuries the hunting ground of the fishing communities of the Romagnol coast. So pedal easy and let the scenery set the pace. Rustic farmhouses, villas, lingering remains of a bygone wetlands culture, fishing cabins, aquatic plants and an incredible variety of often rare birdlife will do the rest.

Departure point for this route is piazza della Libertà¹ in the heart of Bagnacavallo. From here, take via Matteotti² as far as the roundabout and then head right on the cycle lane running along via Di Vittorio. At the traffic lights, cross the San Vitale main road and head straight on into via Boncellino. Follow this road for about 3 kilometres until you come to via Muraglione. Keep on via Muraglione up to the junction with via Sottofiume, which runs along the left bank of the Lamone.³ Here, take the ramp onto the riverbank and the first stopping place on the route. Continue left, following the riverbank (except where you have to negotiate road and railway cuttings) towards Traversara; note the old tower on the left.⁴ After about 3 kilometres you'll come to the bridge over the river in the centre of Traversara. At this point you've covered around 8 kilometres.

Stay up on the riverbank, and after a few hundred metres you'll come to a second stopping place. From here there are about 5 kilometres to the centre of Villanova.⁵ On the way from Traversara to Villanova note the villas on the left.⁶

About two kilometres beyond Villanova the riverbank path is closed for a private function on Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays and you have to detour off the river. Just follow the signs. Now rejoin the left bank towards Glorie⁷ and Mezzano and go under the bridge on the Adriatica highway which marks the boundary with Ravenna. Follow the riverbank (there's a stopping place on the way) as far as the Grattacoppa bridge. You've now come around 20 kilometres. Still following the left bank of the Lamone, after about 5.5 kilometres you'll come to the bridge at the Sant'Alberto provincial main road.⁸ Cross the bridge (careful as there's no cycle lane) and join the cycle lane by the right bank of the river which leads to Punta Alberete reserve.⁹ You're now in the heart of the Po Delta nature Reserve.¹⁰ Continue for another 5.5 kilometres up to the bridge over the Romea highway. 31 clicks on the clock now! At this point there are two routes possible: left into Valle Mandriole¹¹ by the bridge over the Romea highway, or seawards: cross under the highway and follow the right bank (to your left you'll see traditional fisherman's huts and to your right, Pialassa Baiona¹²) all the way to the seashore of Marina Romea.¹³

1. Piazza della Libertà

Overlooking piazza della Libertà is the neoclassical **town hall**, built in 1791 to a design by Cosimo Morelli. Beside the palazzo is the impressive **Goldoni theatre**. Opened in 1845, the interior is sumptuously decorated with stuccoes and frescoes. The impressive tempera backdrop by Bolognese painter Antonio Muzzi is a typical example of the 19th-century vogue for drama-drenched history paintings. On the west side of the piazza stand **Palazzo Vecchio** (originally dating from the 12th and 13th centuries but restored on several occasions since) and the **town tower**. Built in the first half of the 13th century, the tower has been rebuilt several times over the course of the centuries. Internally it's divided into three storeys. It was one of the first of such towers to be fitted with a clock, during the domination of the Este dynasty in the early 16th century. Its bottom level was used as a prison from the 17th to 19th centuries, and since then its three storeys have been known as *Inferno*, *Purgatory* and *Paradise* after Dante's *Divine Comedy*. One of the tower's most (in)famous inmates was the bandit Stefano Pelloni, *nom de guerre* Il Passatore ("The Ferryman"), who was imprisoned here in 1849. Curiously, the large nails driven into the wall at the base of the tower functioned as a kind of lost-and-found office. People finding lost items would hang them from the nails for their rightful owners to reclaim them.



2. Corso Matteotti - Palazzo Capra

Palazzo Papini – later known as palazzo Capra – dates from the 17th century. The façade rises from a flared basement level with windows decorated with raised mouldings and scrolls on the ground floor, while the windows of the piano nobile above are topped with triangular and round pediments. Crowning the façade is a cornice carried on modillions. The entrance leads into a broad atrium and court. From here a grand staircase with stuccoes and frescoed vaults leads to the apartments of the piano nobile. Queen Christina of Sweden stayed at Palazzo Papini-Capra in 1662 during her journey to Rome.



3. The river Lamone

The ancient "Anemo" cited by Pliny the Elder (23 – 79 AD) in his *Naturalis Historia*, the Lamone rises near Colla di Casaglia in the Apennines and drains into the Adriatic over a course of some 100 kilometres. On its way across the plain of Romagna to the sea it passes Casalborsetti, Marina Romea, Marradi, Brisighella, Faenza, Bagnacavallo and Russi. And it's namechecked in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, where the poet describes Faenza as "the city of the Lamone".



4. Traversara - the tower

The tower of Traversara was built in 1371 by the Ercolani family. When the Ercolani built their own palazzo in the centre of Bagnacavallo, the tower became their summer retreat, a function which it continued to perform right through to the 19th century. It was modified in 1717 and again in 1736. Badly damaged by the bombardments of 1944, the tower has since been partially rebuilt.



5. Villanova – Museum of marsh grasses

Villanova di Bagnacavallo is the local capital of reed crafts. This excellent museum has recovered and conserved an exceptional local heritage of the many methods of working marsh grasses, and is a good introduction to the traditional marshland culture. Special attention goes to the time-honoured techniques of reed work which flourished in the small community of Villanova from the 14th century until as recently as the 1970s. The museum organizes workshops for those wishing to learn the techniques, and every year in the second fortnight of September hosts a reed crafts fair.



6. Casa Baldi Randi, la Cagnazza, la Bubana

Casa Baldi Randi was built in 1850 as a country retreat for cardinal Lorenzo Randi, a native of Bagnacavallo then living in Rome. Architecturally the house is typical of the Veneto-Ferrara taste in country villas, with a large atrium opening onto numerous reception rooms. Adjacent to the villa is the oratory of Our Lady of the Assumption.



La Cagnazza owes its rather strange nickname ("The Cur") to the sculptural feature in the form of a dog on the top of the façade facing the river.

La Bubana, built in the late 18th century, La Bubana seems to have originally been a monastery. Like La Cagnazza, it has a curious name, perhaps a conflation of the surname of its owners, the Bubani, and an expression in the local dialect, *bubâna*, meaning abundance.

7. Glorie - Villa Savoia

Villa Savoia was built in the 17th and 18th centuries and is now the property of the diocese of Faenza. It comprises a palazzo, which now serves as a rectory, and an oratory. The hall of the palazzo is decorated with two large tempera paintings by Tomaso Bibiena. The oratory, restored in 1987, has some interesting Baroque decor.



8. Sant'Alberto

Just 3 km off the main road, Sant'Alberto is well worth the detour. The village looks over the marshes of Valli di Comacchio which can be reached by the ferry over the river Reno, the former Po di Primaro. Local buildings of note include the house in which poet Olindo Guerrini lived and the Palazzone, built in 1600 and originally an inn for wayfarers, travelling salesmen and pilgrims. Today it houses the visitors' centre for Po Delta nature Reserve and the "Alfredo Brandolini" natural science museum.

9. Punte Alberete reserve

Punte Alberete is a semi-submerged forest with a unique ambience whose appeal derives from the combination of wetland vegetation, submerged grasslands, the occasional dry clearing, and the flora and fauna typical of an exceptionally rich marsh ecology. The reeds and grasses of Punte Alberete are home to much rare flora and are the nesting grounds of some rare bird species.

10. Po Delta nature Reserve

Po Delta nature Reserve is a protected estuary system with an area of nearly 60,000 hectares which preserve all the ecological riches of the Po delta. The reserve spreads over two provinces, Ferrara and Ravenna. There's a lot in here: remnants of primitive Mediterranean *macchia*, fenland, coastal lagoons, dunes, salt marshes, freshwater wetland. There are also Etruscan and Roman remains, Byzantine mosaics, and medieval relics of the Benedictines and the Este dynasty: a microcosm, in other words, of the natural and cultural attractions of this part of the Po valley. Best time to visit is spring or summer when some rare plant species are in bloom, such as water lily, hawthorn, march iris, spring snowflakes, rushes, and yellowflag. Over 280 types of birds have been identified in the reserve. Of these, half use the reserve as their nesting ground while the other half stop here en route between northern Europe and Africa. They include pink flamingos, grey, pink and white herons, little egrets, black-winged stilts, curlew sandpipers, tufted ducks, woodcocks, kingfishers, and squacco heron. Tel. +39 0533.314003

11. Valle Mandriole (Valle della Canna)

This protected freshwater marsh was once part of the Lamone reclamation basin along with Punte Alberete. From the viewing tower on the perimeter of the marsh the landscape is an almost endless extent of rushes punctuated with clearings here and there. It's the ideal place for spotting heron (white, pink or grey), grebes and marsh hawks.



12. Pialassa Baiona

Pialassa Baiona is a large saltwater lagoon irrigated by a network of canals lined by some typical fisherman's cabins. The mounds that emerge from the water shelter some very rare plant species (glasswort, limonium etc.) as well as many types of birds (black-winged stilts, avocets, little egrets, herons).

13. Marina Romea

Immersed in green and sheltered by the ancient pine forest, with sweeping beaches and charming villas, Marina Romea is one of prettiest shorelines on the whole coast.

